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A
S E R M O N

*occasioned by the death
of the reverend*

Mr. JOSEPH MORRIS:

preached at

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L O N D O N,

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L O N D O N,

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I THESSAL. IV. 13---18.

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we beleive that Jesus died and rose again; even so them also, who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord; that we who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them who are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we, who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

IT is observable, that the apostle Paul no less than four or five times in this short epistle makes mention of the future coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but in none of them so largely and particularly, as in this text, which I have now read. His manifest

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fest view in it is to comfort the Thessalonian christians, under the sorrowful thought of the death of some of their brethren, who had died since their taking on them the profession of christianity. He shews, that whatever might be their own loss, in parting with their dear freinds; yet their freinds themselves, such as did *really sleep in Jesus*, that is, such as died in the hearty beleif of the christian doctrine, and in a course of practice agreable to it, could be no losers but great gainers; because by that very religion, which they professed and practised, there is abundant assurance given, that such persons shall at the end of this world be raised from their graves, and together with those of the same character, who shall then remain alive, be made for ever happy *with the Lord*, in whom they have beleived, and whom they have faithfully obeyed. From these considerations he justly infers, that they could have no reason to sorrow on such occasions, like those who, for want of the gospel revelation, were without this joyful hope; but ought to comfort one another with the refreshing thought of the happiness, which their departed freinds were sure to enjoy.

This is the apostle's immediate view, and is most directly suited to the occasion of our present

sent meeting. But together with this it will be worth the while to carry in our minds another very important thought relating to ourselves ; which is, the fortifying our minds against the fear of death in our own persons. The doctrine of the text is well worth our consideration in this view ; which does not at all interfere with that, which the apostle had most directly in his thoughts. Mortal as we are, and constantly liable to death, either by some distemper, or by any one of a thousand accidents, which may befall us e're we are aware, it becomes us to make the thought of death familiar to us ; that we may live as those, who expect to die, and who know not how soon death may overtake us ; and that we may wait for our great change with that calmness, which becomes those who have ground to hope, that it will be greatly to their advantage. And certainly, if christians have reason to *comfort one another* upon the death of their freinds, *who die in the Lord* ; they have ground for joyful hope, instead of slavish fear, in the view of their own departure, if they themselves are faithful in the profession they have taken upon them.

Let us therefore proceed to consider the particulars of the doctrine, which the text contains. The apostle comforts the beleiv-

ing Theſſalonians chiefly with theſe conſiderations: that the reſurrection of Jeſus from the dead is a juſt ground for believing, that his faithful followers ſhall alſo riſe, and by the power of God be brought together at the laſt day with their Lord and maſter, whom they have ſerved; and that being brought together, they ſhall be ever with him. Theſe are the conſiderations, with which the apoſtle comforts the minds of the believing Theſſalonians, and exhorts them to comfort one another. But between theſe grand arguments of comfort he inserts an account of ſome remarkable circumſtances of the future reſurrection, and of the gathering together of thoſe faithful chriſtians, who ſhall be alive and remain upon earth at that time, with thoſe who ſhall be raiſed out of their graves; and obſerves, that the one ſhall not go before the other to that ſupreme happineſs, which is reſerved for both in the heavenly ſtate, but that both ſhall be made completely happy together. Every part of the text affords matter of joy and comfort to the faithful ſervants of Chriſt: and therefore, I ſhall take the liberty to conſider the whole in that order, in which the particulars lie. The apoſtle obſerves,

I. That the reſurrection of Jeſus from the dead is a juſt ground for believing, that his faithful-

faithful followers shall also rise; and shall by the power of God be brought together at the last day with their Lord and Master, whom they have served.

This is contained in those words, ver. 14. *For if we beleive, that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also, who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.*

If we beleive. The apostle does not in these words make any doubt, whether the Thessalonian christians did beleive, that Christ died and rose again. But he appeals to them, that since they did beleive these things, they ought to take the comfort, which naturally flows from such a beleif: which is, the thought that the faithful followers of Jesus shall likewise be raised, to be made happy with him. He speaks of the resurrection of Jesus from that death, which he suffered for their sake, as a sure pledge of their resurrection to a life, which shall never have an end. Christ himself *being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no farther power over him.* And so shall it be with those, who have lived and died in his faithful service. They shall not be kept under the power of the grave; but shall surely rise, and be gathered together unto him, whom they have served.

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The apostle chooses to speak of the death of faithful christians under the similitude of sleep. *Those also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* They are not, it seems, to be accounted of as dead, and past all hope of life, being only in a sleep; such a sleep, out of which they shall be sure to awake, and *enter into the joy of their Lord.*

Sleeping in Jesus signifies dying in the profession and practice of the christian religion, as I have already observed. And such are the persons, to whom the doctrine of Christ's resurrection gives ground of comfort, both with regard to the death of their departed brethren, and the view of their own. Our Lord Jesus did neither *die* for himself, nor *rise* for himself only. *He died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him;* as the apostle observes in chap. v. of this epistle, ver. 10. And he rose again; not only that he might enter into that glory, which was to be the reward of his doing and suffering the will of his heavenly father; but also that he might receive and exercise the power of raising his faithful followers from the grave, and of crowning their labours and sufferings with immortal life. To this purpose he himself speaks, Joh. vi. 39, 40. *This is the Father's will,*

will, who hath sent me ; that of all, whom he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but shou'd raise them up again at the last day. And this is the will of him, that sent me ; that every one, who seeth the Son, and beleiveth on him, may have everlasting life ; and I will raise him up at the last day. The like he had declared in chap. v. ver. 25---29. And to the same purpose are many other passages in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus, by giving up himself unto death in the course of that ministry, which he undertook, not only merited of the Father to be raised and restored to the glory, which he had laid down ; but likewise merited the *power*, which was *given him in heaven and in earth*, particularly that of raising his followers to a glory resembling his own. This power was conferred on him as a reward of his great humiliation, and particularly of his submitting to death in the course of his ministry.

And therefore it is with great propriety, that the apostle in the text speaks of the *death* of Christ, as well as of his resurrection. *If we beleive that Christ died.* Now if we give credit to any part of our Saviour's history, as recorded in the evangelists, we cannot fail of beleiving that grand article of his death, in which they all

so exactly agree, and which is so largely set forth in many particular circumstances. The Jews, our Lord's inveterate enemies, made sure work here; so sure, that they thought it impossible for him to rise; and would not believe that he afterwards did rise. But the greater assurances they gave, that Christ did really die; the greater was the assurance afterwards, that he was raised from the dead; because of the abundant proofs given after his death, that he was really alive; besides the circumstances attending his resurrection.

Now this resurrection of Christ from the dead, of which his apostles had received the fullest demonstration, not only gave a firm ground for believing all that he had taught in the Father's name, and particularly for believing *the promise of eternal life*, which he had made so great a part of his doctrine; but likewise became, as was before observed, a proper pledge of the resurrection of his faithful followers to such a life, as in the Father's name he had promised them. No way so suitable for establishing the hope, which the promise had raised, as the shewing by infallible proofs, that he, who had delivered it, was actually raised to life, and ascended triumphantly into heaven, after he had

had suffered the most cruel and ignominious death.

The faithful followers of Jesus Christ have therefore abundant reason to beleive, that they, and their pious freinds who are gone before them, shall be raised to that life of eternal happinefs, which in his ministry he so often promised. And consequently they ought not to be over-much concerned at the thought of the way through which they are to pass towards it, *the valley of the shadow of death*; or too much dejected at parting with their dear freinds for a while.

This is the first observation from the words of the text, in ver. 14. *If we beleive that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* This verse does not indeed contain the mention of that happinefs, to which the faithful shall be raised; but only the assurance of a future resurrection, argued from Christ's own resurrection after his death. The happinefs itself is mentioned ver. 17. *And so shall we ever be with the Lord.* But before the exprefs mention of that, the apostle observes,

II. That they, who shall remain alive at the coming of the Lord, shall not enter upon
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the promised happiness before those, who will then be in their graves.

This is contained in ver. 15. and is delivered with great solemnity, as if received by immediate revelation from heaven. *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord; that they, who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them who are asleep.* What way soever this assurance was received, it is delivered by an inspired apostle, not as his own private opinion, but as the word of the Lord: *This we say unto you by the word of the Lord.* And the thing itself it suited to the wisdom and goodness of him, who is *the Lord both of quick and dead.* When the time of retribution is come, it is fitting that all the faithful should be gathered together, that they may together enjoy the happiness promised; those of preceding generations, with such who shall then be alive, when the retribution commences. Whatever comfort the departed faithful may have enjoyed in the intermediate state, which in the text is compared to *sleep*; whatever pleasure in being freed from the snares, dangers, and manifold evils of the life they had led upon earth; whatever satisfaction in the security of that good hope, which had formerly been attended with many fears: yet they are to enjoy

enjoy a much greater felicity at the resurrection; which those who shall then be alive upon earth, are not to enter upon before them.

It may be proper here to observe: that the apostle speaks in such a manner, as if he and the christians of that age in which he lived, would be alive and remain till the resurrection: *We, who are alive and remain, shall not prevent them who sleep.* But it is plain, that his meaning is, *those of us christians, who shall be alive and remain at that day.* Concerning the apostle himself, it is evident from other parts of his writings, that he did not expect to live to that day; but to die, as he really did, a martyr for the faith. And if the Thessalonians, to whom he then wrote, did any of them mistake his words in this epistle, he took care to rectify their mistake in his next, which was written but about a year after: beseeching them, chap. II. ver. 1, 2, 3. *not to be soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by letter, as from him, that the day of Christ was at hand.* He adds: *Let no man deceive you by any means. For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.* And in ver. 5. he appeals to them, *that while he was yet with them he had told*

them these things. In the words of the text therefore, he only speaks of christians in general, and of himself as one of them; and signifies that those of that character, who should remain alive at the resurrection, should not enter into the complete happiness promised to the faithful before their departed brethren, who were sleeping in their graves.

III. The apostle upon this proceeds to enumerate several circumstances, which shall attend the resurrection, or follow shortly after it. The particulars of which are contained in ver. 16, 17. *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then they, who are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.*

All these things are delivered in the same train of discourse, as that in the preceding verse: *This we say unto you by the word of the Lord.* By which the apostle should seem to mean, that he had the assurance of all these things by immediate revelation from heaven; as he assured the beleiving Galatians concerning the whole of that gospel which he had preached to them, *that he was not taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.* Gal. 1. 12,

A considerable part indeed of what is contained in my text, our Lord himself had delivered in the days of his ministry, particularly Matth. xxiv. 30, 31. *Then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven: and then shall the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory: and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* And other circumstances may be gathered from other places. But what we are to learn from the whole is, that the final happiness of the departed faithful shall be introduced with very great solemnity; the Lord himself not thinking it beneath him to descend from heaven for that purpose, with a shout and the voice of the archangel; and to employ his angels to gather his elect together, in order to glorify them in the view of the whole world.

But there is a particular circumstance related in ver. 16. and design'd as a special honour to the departed faithful: *the dead in Christ shall rise first.* This must, I think, be understood all those who died in the faith of Jesus Christ, having lived agreeably to the faith which they professed. And this same apostle

file, writing to the church at Corinth, scruples not to affirm, from the assurance which he had received to that purpose, that the saints shall concur with Christ, in judging the rest of the world. Nay he appeals to them that they themselves knew it, 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3. *Do ye not know, that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*

Our blessed Lord himself, whilst on earth, had assured his apostles, that *they should sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*, Luk. xxii. 29, 30. And there seems to be a special reason for the apostles being allowed to concur with their great master in passing condemnation upon the unbelieving Jews their countrymen, who rejected the great blessing of the gospel which the apostles embraced, and in Christ's name offered to their countrymen, at the peril of their own peace and life. It is for somewhat the like reason, that the saints in general shall *judge the world*, and concur in the sentence which shall pass upon incorrigible sinners, for not turning from the evil of their ways, in the use of those means which proved effectual to their own happiness. And not only will they concur in the sentence; but

as they are to be raised first, they will have likewise, by means of the sentence before passed in their own favour, the opportunity of seeing and concurring in the whole process against the wicked. In effect they will join in this process, by the * testimony, which their wiser and better conduct must give against the unwarrantable behaviour of those, who would shew no regard to the means of grace which were afforded to them. By the sentence it self, which will be passed on the faithful, they will be instated in a kingdom, a royal dignity, resembling in some measure that of the great king, who thus exalts them. For this is the very tenour of the sentence, as represented, Matth. xxv. 34. *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* In this character of royal dignity they will concur with Christ to judge the world, having received the highest honours in the sight of those, who upon earth despised them, and held them in great contempt for that very

* Noah is said, even while here upon earth, *to have condemned the world*, Heb. xi. 7. And this he did by the testimony, which his conduct, proceeding from the steadfastness of his faith, gave against the wickedness of the age in which he lived : to which he delivered divine warnings all the while the ark was preparing.

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conduct, and particularly that humility of heart and self-denial, for which their judge rewards them with glory and inexpressible joy.

The mention of this leads me to consider, IV. The last thing contained in the text, the exceeding great and eternal felicity of those, who die in the Lord, that they shall ever be with him : *So shall we ever be with the Lord.*

The first thing that presents itself to our thoughts on this occasion, is the removal from this earth, the scene of all the miseries they had endured, and of all the dangerous snares which had surrounded them ; and which, though they could afford them no other delights, than those of a gross kind and short duration, had yet, from their earthly frame, proved the unhappy means of bitter reflexions, upon giving too much way to them. From all the sorrows which they felt here, and the snares which betrayed them into those sorrows, the saints will be effectually set free, when they are taken up from hence, and enter upon the heavenly state. Nay, this happiness they may be said to enjoy, as soon as they leave the world by death : but the heavenly state into which they will be removed, will be the completion of their happiness.

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By which heavenly state I do not mean barely the beautiful and glorious appearance of the heaven itself, considered as a place, though far more excellent and desirable than this earth which we inhabit; for that of all other considerations is the meanest, with regard to the sublime felicity of the heavenly state. But the great excellency of that happiness will consist in the clear manifestation of God's complacency, whose more immediate residence is in heaven: where, when he has advanced his faithful servants into nearer views of his glory, than they were capable of enjoying, or even of bearing here upon earth, they will have the most ravishing sense of his high complacency; and be employed in the constant exercise of those good and holy habits, which were begun here, and which, even in this vale of tears, gave them a well-grounded joy in the sense of God's approbation, but will then be increased and heightened beyond expression.

Whatever can be called real happiness, must be greater or lesser, according to our fitness and capacity to enjoy it. A mind therefore, endued with the power of knowing and following after those things which are really and internally good, and yet at the same time capable of neglecting them,

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can never be truly happy, till it has learned to delight in those good things above all other. And the more it is habituated to such a delight, the more happiness it will enjoy; and whatever hinders the establishment of the habit, abates just so much of the felicity. There are indeed delights of a lower kind, suited to our present earthly state, which in a moderate way we may safely enjoy, and which were design'd for our entertainment here. But there is danger of too great indulgence; and the more we give way to these, the less is our capacity and fitness for the higher enjoyments of the spiritual kind. When therefore the spirits of departed saints are freed from the incumbrance of flesh, they will exercise with more advantage, and inexpressibly more pleasure and delight, the good habits, of which the foundations were laid in a state of trial and difficulty. Their understandings, which here below were too much clouded with the fumes of earthly affections, will see more clearly the excellency and true worth of what is in itself essentially good; there will be a high delight in that course of action, which suits the relation to God and to his creatures: and as there will be nothing to hinder their pursuing that, which the well guided judgment approves, that course will be

be steddily pursued, and the delight in it will continually more and more increase. That is to say, the departed saints will continually see more and more reason for *loving the best of beings with all their heart, and soul, and mind*, and for mixing that ardent affection with the highest reverence and veneration. They will at the same time see more and more reason for *loving one another*, in a much better manner than did here below, where there were so many things to hinder their judging aright concerning each others conduct; and the pleasure of promoting to the utmost of their power each others happiness will increase accordingly. The uninterrupted exercise of these habits, attended with the clearest views of God's approbation and complacency, will prove the happiness of the heavenly state to be inexpressibly superior to our best enjoyments, even those of the same kind, here upon earth; and infinitely superior to those of any other kind, which relate to the inferior part of our make and constitution.

Thus I have discoursed briefly on the grand constituents of that felicity, to which departed saints shall be advanced, when they are taken up from earth to the heavenly regions, where *they shall ever be with the Lord*. And these are the uninterrupted exercise of,

and increafing delight in, thofe holy habits, which had their begining in the ftate of trial; together with the clear manifef- tations of the complacency of the greateft and wifeft, the moft holy and moft beneficent of all beings. For though the foundation muft be laid in the inward difpofition and temper of the mind, without which it is impoffible there fhould be true happinefs; yet the clear and conftant views of the approbation and complacency of the moft perfect being is that, which will give to this happinefs its higheft perfection.

But we ought not to pafs over without a diftinct notice, that thought which the apoftle in our text chofe to mention in a particular manner: that the faints fhall for ever be *with the Lord*, whom they had ferved; the Lord their redeemer, whose fubjects they chofe to be in the conftitution of his heavenly kingdom; and whose commands, though not without infirmities and failings, they had faithfully obferved. Their *being for ever with him* is mentioned in the text as the very happinefs, to which they fhall be advanced. And we may remember, that it was under the character of happinefs that our Lord, in the time of his humiliation, not long before the greateft degree of it, when he was in the near profpect of fuf-
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fering upon the cross, prayed to his Father; that his faithful disciples might be with him, that they might behold his glory; the glory which the Father had given him, who loved him before the foundation of the world, Joh. xvii. 21. This being with Christ, and beholding his glory; was, I say, desired by Christ for his faithful disciples, in the character of high felicity. And so undoubtedly it will prove; as they will bear a part in all that glory and happiness, that high glory and happiness, to which the Son will be exalted by the Father, for transacting their salvation, and suffering so deeply in order to effect it.

The blessed Jesus undertook this whole affair in obedience to the will of the Father, who engaged him in it: and he receives, for his obedience unto the death of the cross, a glory additional to that which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world. In all this glory he desires, that his faithful followers may bear a part; as they willingly partook with him in that contempt, with which he and his doctrine were treated upon earth. And accordingly I make no doubt, that the saints in heaven will participate with Christ in all the glorious manifestations of God's high complacency in him; and that these will crown and give per-

perfection to the happiness, which naturally arises from holy dispositions.

I shall add only one word more to set forth the excellency of the happiness, of which I have been discoursing. And that is, the eternity of its duration. *So shall we ever be with the Lord.* If there were any danger, that the saints once possessed of this felicity could lose or be deprived of it, much of the comfort which the prospect of it affords, would by that means be abated; and the uncertainty of such an event would destroy much of the pleasure conceived. But to our great consolation, *eternal life is the promise of him who cannot lie*; Tit. 1. 2. And there is no foundation for supposing, that the *eternity* here spoken of is to be understood in any other than the strict and literal sense. The *life*, which I have been describing, is *life* indeed; such as shall never be cut off by death. After it has continued for millions of ages, it will still be as fresh, with the joyful prospect of everlasting duration, as if it was but newly begun. This is the happiness, into which *they who sleep in Jesus* shall be received at the resurrection.

And now, my brethren, I will appeal to yourselves, whether the apostle had not abundant reason to conclude his discourse with

with exhorting the Thessalonians to *comfort one another* with the thoughts he had laid before them; and whether, besides the consolation which those thoughts yeild with regard to our pious departed friends, they do not likewise afford a just ground of comfort and joy in the prospect of our own dissolution, provided we are found to be Christ's faithful disciples. The same thoughts, which yeild consolation in the one case, will give joy in the other, if the character of *true christians* belongs to us. *If we beleive that Jesus died and rose again*; and take care so to order our conduct, that when we fall asleep, we may *sleep in Jesus*; all the comfort and joy of his resurrection, and of the glories which shall follow, belong to us. And this thought, which is clearly enough included in the doctrine of the text, though not its most immediate view, is fit to be often revolved in our minds.

'Tis true, death is spoken of in Scripture itself as *the * king of terrors*. And the very prospect of going into an unseen, unknown state has something shocking in it; something, which has a tendency to bring the soul into *bondage*, as the apostle expresses it, Heb. ii. 15. But he there ob-

* Job xviii. 14.

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serves; that Christ's taking part of flesh and blood, with the view of defeating and destroying by death him who had the power of death, was the proper means of delivering those, who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage. Such is our condition at present, that we cannot pass into the happy future state, reserved for the faithful, without either going through death, or such a change as is equivalent to it. How disagreeable soever therefore the passage may be; let the sure prospect of what is to be enjoyed beyond the grave, reconcile us to it. If we are Christ's, all our sorrows and troubles will be left behind us; nor shall we find ourselves losers for any sincere grief conceived at the thought of having discharged our duty no better. But let us take care, while we are yet in a state of trial, to discharge every duty in such manner, that we may have a right to encourage the hope set before us in the text. Let us adhere firmly to our profession, and live in the practice of what we profess. And this will effectually set us above all the scoffs of those, who deride the profession. They will be strangers to the joy, which will overflow in our hearts. And this we may depend on, that notwithstanding the difference between natural constitutions,

tutions, by means of which some are more prone to greif and melancholy, and others more chearful; yet that christian, who in the stated course of his life takes care to be found in the practice of his duty, in conformity to the holy gospel which he has professed, will be the most likely to die joyful. And we have seen it fully proved, that all such have abundant ground and foundation for it.

But our text most expressly calls upon us, in the character of Christ's disciples, to comfort one another with regard to our pious freinds, who are by death removed from us; with the consideration, that God who raised from the dead the blessed Jesus, their Lord and ours, will also raise them, and bring them with him to the enjoyment of an eternal life of complete happiness; and that they and we shall ever be with the Lord, after the short separation which is made by death. Their happiness is secured, because all the snares and dangers of their state of trial are at an end. And together with these snares and dangers, an end is likewise put to all kinds of sorrow and trouble, that ever did attend them. They are in the sure prospect of supreme felicity; and in the actual possession of high degrees of happiness, vastly beyond what this world

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could afford; though not in the full possession of all that will be enjoyed, when the resurrection takes place, and their bodies and souls are re-united. On these accounts they may truly be said to be *present with the Lord*, while they are *absent from the body*; whereas when they were *at home in the body*, they were *absent from the Lord*, as the apostle observes, 2 Cor. v. 6. For while clogged with such bodies, as we all carry about us in the present state, they had not those clear communications of the favour and love of Christ, which are to be enjoyed when the soul is freed from the corruptions which attend flesh and blood. But the bodies of the saints at the resurrection *will be raised * incorruptible*; and so *changed*, as deservedly to be called *spiritual bodies*, in comparison of these *earthly, animal bodies*, which often hinder the operations of the inhabiting spirit. *This corruptible will put on incorruption: and this mortal will put on immortality.* Then will the happiness of Christ's faithful followers be complete, inexpressibly beyond all that I have been describing: and, which crowns all, the happiness shall never have an end.

This is a just foundation of *comfort* with regard to our dear friends, *who die in the*

* 1 Cor. xv.

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Lord, after having faithfully served him in the course of their lives. With this thought therefore we ought to comfort ourselves, and one another, upon the removal of our brother, whose death is the occasion of our present meeting. Of whose life and character permit me to give the following brief account: which may, I hope, be of some benefit to those who survive him.

Mr. *Joseph Morris* was born at *Badbey*, near *Daventry*, in the county of *Northampton*, about seventy years ago, but in what year is not certainly known. His father was a dissenting minister, of the Baptist denomination, in that county, and one of the messengers of the churches in that neighbourhood. The son was in his early years taken notice of for his piety and good genius; and having made a considerable progress, both in grammar learning and academical studies, had a proposal made to him, of being sent to one of our universities for farther improvement. But declining this offer, he was by some generous * patrons sent over into *Holland*; and studied some years at *Amsterdam*, under the direction of the celebrated Mr. *John le Clerc* and Mr. *Philip Limborch*. But as he chose to make the Scriptures the rule of his faith

* *The family of the Wrights of Daventry.*

and practice, he no farther espoused the sentiments of others, than as they appeared to him consistent with those sacred oracles.

He was a very close student, and took in a large compass of knowledge : but his chief care was to be intimately acquainted with the holy Scriptures. For which purpose he gained a considerable skill in both those languages in which they were first written ; and then applied himself to the study of the originals, and of the learned commentators upon them. This critical knowledge of the Scriptures enabled him to defend them against the false and injurious reflections of the enemies of revelation ; who often rashly reproach what they never took the pains to understand, or fairly to examine. Of this he has given some remarkable instances in that judicious volume of sermons, which he left behind him ; and would have given more, if health and some other circumstances had concurred to favour him, in what he further designed.

He was well read in universal history, and particularly in what relates to ecclesiastical affairs ; well acquainted with the ancient apologists for christianity, and the objections raised against it by its enemies, both ancient and modern, and well qualified to answer them. He was likewise
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well acquainted with the controversies, which christians have unhappily raised among themselves. But though he was a zealous advocate for what he beleived to be the truth, he chose rather to employ his ministry in practical discourses, than in those of the contentious kind: and even when engaged in controversy was careful to lay down the reasons why he differed from his brethren, without expressing passionate reflections against them.

After his return from *Holland*, having exercised his ministry for a few years in *Northamptonshire* and the neighbouring counties, he was, in the year 1724, called and ordained to the pastoral care of this church, in conjunction with its ancient pastor, the reverend Mr. *Thomas Kerby*; with whom he lived in great freindship and esteem. But they did not officiate long together; the one being removed by death in the year 1727, after having, by reason of his very great age, for a considerable time desisted from preaching.

How faithfully our dear brother, whom you have lately lost, served you in the character and relation which he took upon him, you yourselves are witnesses. But I would desire you moreover to remember, in a particular manner, how plainly he shewed, by
his

his course of action, the sincerity of the profession which he made as a christian; exemplifying by his conduct what he recommended as a minister. He practised the duties of a christian life: and was not ashamed to let it be known, that he practised them upon christian principles; beleiving in Christ, as appointed of God to be his instructor, his ruler, and his rewarder. Of this I speak with the greater confidence, because I myself have with great delight been a witness of his zeal in recommending obedience to Christ, upon the principle of beleiving his divine mission.

He particularly excelled in humility, and meekness, and patience, and in delighting to do good, after the example of his Lord and Master. His penetrating, solid judgment, joined to a very extensive compass of learning, would have made him be taken notice of much more than he was, had they not been accompanied with too great a backwardness to shew them on proper occasions. It is to be feared, that the humble opinion he entertained of himself, and the consequent modesty of his behaviour in conversation, were the occasion of his being sometimes unkindly treated, where more respect would have been shewn him, if he had taken more on himself. But he knew,
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that an assuming carriage did not become him, and chose rather to err in the other extreme. He had learnt to bear provocations without those violent resentments, which some men of otherwise good characters are apt to entertain. The patience, which he shewed upon many other occasions, had a severe trial in the very small success he met with during the course of many years preaching, the preparations for which discovered great labour and judgment. It was his great grief to see himself so little attended. Yet as he delighted to enter deeply into the subjects he treated, and thought himself obliged to set before his hearers the duties and privileges of christians in a strong light; he went on to the last in that labourious course.

His great delight in doing good appeared in his unwearied labours to procure and convey needful supplies to poor ministers in the country, and to the widows and orphans of those who were deceased; to obtain proper books for students, as well as exhibitions for their support; and to get relief for distressed families, whether of ministers or others. In works of this nature he employed himself with a zeal and diligence, which sometimes turned to his own disadvantage. Nor did the narrowness of his income

come prevent him from contributing to the kind and charitable purposes, which he recommended to his freinds. His heart was in the work ; and therefore he willingly bore with straits and difficulties to carry it on.

God grant, that the wholesome instructions which he delivered, and the good example which his course of life yeilded to those under his immediate care, may have their genuine effect and influence upon them. Consider, my brethren, that 'tis of great importance to you, that this effect be produced. Remember, that you are answerable for all the advantages, which you might have received, both from his ministry and his conversation ; and that if you do not suffer them to produce a happy effect, a miserable one will surely follow ; that he, who was desirous to be your successful guide to the heavenly felicity, will be a witness against you, if you indulge any of the vices, against which he so solemnly warned you, or do not practise the virtues to which he so earnestly exhorted you, and which he recommended to you by his own example. Consider the danger of neglecting to put on christian habits, as well as that of indulging the contrary vices. For though you should not at present be remarkably given to any one vice ; yet if under
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the advantage of so excellent a ministry as you have enjoyed, you do not labour to establish holy habits, the contrary vicious principles will prevail, and root out every thing that is good from within you. And the dreadful consequence of this you cannot fail of seeing. I take the liberty to give this awful warning to all, who sate under the ministry of my honoured brother; at the same time that I have the pleasure of being well satisfied, that there are those, who will be *his joy and his crown in the day of the Lord Jesus*. Bear with the word of exhortation; and let it not be lost upon you.

May God direct you to supply usefully the vacant place. But I cannot advise you to wait till you find one who will in all respects fill it up. A person of less abilities than your deceased pastor may, with kind encouragement on your part, prove the happy means of building you up, and making you increase in number and strength. Only remember, that much of a minister's success depends upon the people's hearty affection and kind behaviour towards him, and their earnest prayers to God for him. And give me leave to recommend one thing in particular, which will always be of great importance to you, as well towards keeping alive a sense of religion upon your own

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minds,

minds, as encouraging your minister. And that is, the attending on what is most properly called *worship* ; attending the public addressees to the Almighty, as well as merely hearing what the minister can say upon a text of scripture. There are many scandalously guilty in this respect. Guilty, I say : and a great guilt I account it, in those, who with a little resolution and care in ordering affairs at home, might be able to attend the whole exercise of public devotion ; which, it must be owned, some are not able to do, however not at all times. But there are some (I am sorry to say it) professed christians, who by their conduct give reason to beleive, that they are resolved they will not come to the public assembly till the prayers are near finished. As if the solemn social worship of the supreme being was what they had nothing to do with ! O how different is their disposition from that of the royal psalmist ! who could appeal to his Maker, * *Lord I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.* How they will be able to answer for their conduct to that greatest and best of beings, upon whose public service they cast such contempt, I am not able to see. He perfectly knows, whether it is not in their power,

* Psal. xxvi. 8.

with a little care on their side, and a little delight in the work of prayer, to attend the whole public exercise. But there is too much reason to suspect, that they who willingly and statedly neglect prayer in the public assembly, neglect it likewise in their closets and their families. And what sense of religion towards God such persons bear upon their minds; or what real advantage they are likely to reap from the preaching, which meer curiosity leads them to attend; I must leave their own consciences to judge. I hope better things from you, my brethren: and conclude with humbly recommending you to God, and to the word of his grace; who is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified.



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